

Addressing life-long education needs via exploitation of high tech

A boost for non-traditional learners

By Aden Nagrace

KUCHING — Development in educational and information technologies should be exploited to address life-long learning needs, especially for the non-traditional learners, Datuk Dr George Chan said.

The Deputy Chief Minister added that new delivery systems were crucial as traditional methods alone could no longer cope with addressing the needs of adult interests, the homebound learners, the mobile and distant workers and many others who wanted to invest in their own self-development.

"The near future will see the growth in importance and demand of life-long education for non-traditional learners. The scenario will be different. It will no longer be a case of the 18-year-old university student milling around a physical campus for a normal undergraduate programme," he noted.

As such, he said, development in educational and information technologies must be exploited to open up new learning frontiers and opportunities.

Opening a five-day International Conference on Computers in Education (ICCE), attended by over 200 participants from 30 countries, Datuk Dr Chan, who is also the Finance and Public Utilities Minister, said Malaysia belonged to a new generation of nations whose socio-economic transformation was different from the experience of developed countries.

He said the country was witnessing an accelerated process of socio-economic transformation ... from an agriculture-based society to an industrialised one within a much shorter span of time.

"We think we have to move on to deal with the changes and requirement of a post-industrial society even now.

"The people of Malaysia have to face these changes within a much shorter time compared to people in developed nations. They need to look closely at the way they educate their young and the new life they will face. Against such a backdrop, computers and information technology are without doubt a major technology enabler that will take us through these changes into the next millennium," he added.

Datuk Dr Chan said recognising the importance of IT in the development and transformation process, the State government had embarked on a series of activities over the last decade or so, which included the setting up of a State IT Council and the State Information System Sdn Bhd (SIS). SIS is a company wholly owned by the State government to plan and implement IT in the public sector.

"Through these and other measures, the State is making good progress in the implementation of its State Computerisation Masterplan. I can quite confidently say the Sarawak government is among the more advanced in terms of IT use."

Datuk Dr Chan noted that the recent convergence of the World Wide Web, information infrastructure and high performance computing and communication technologies constituted an important advancement in the application of advanced technologies.

He called for more government-industry efforts and co-operation between inter-disciplinary teams of researchers and content providers to ensure that the State's workforce would have the technical skill to compete in an information-driven global economy.

He commended Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and other similar organisations for their part in enhancing Sarawak's image "beyond that of a romantic history, exotic cultures and natural wonders" by organising the ICCE.

Datuk Dr Chan opined that the ICCE97 was a good platform for the country to show the world its commitment and efforts in the area of IT education. The opportunity would also be used to further promote the research and development culture and expedite IT development, especially the national Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project.

ICCE 97 chairperson and the Dean for the IT Faculty, Unimas, Professor Zaidah Razak said the conference served as the forum for innovative responses to the challenges of education in IT. "Also, it is concerned with the current state of the art, acting as a reference basis for future research and with the real-world deployment of educational technologies."

The conference will see a rich blend of presentations comprising 14 talks, 92 papers, 28 posters, 15 examples-in-practice, a panel discussion and 12 tutorials. The participants include those from Australia, Austria, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Guam, Hong-kong, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, USA and Uzbekistan.

Professor Zaidah said the conference would address a wide spectrum of topics that covered Teaching-Learning Strategies & Environments, Technologies & Innovative Applications, Education Reform & Support and Social & Cultural Issues, all of which have developed rapidly under the competitive climate of the education business and the explosive use of the Internet and multi/hypermedia.

Among those present were UNIMAS vice chancellor Professor Dato Zawawi Ismail, President of the Asia Pacific Chapter of the Association of Computing in Education, Professor Tak Wai Chan and Co-chairs of the International Programme Committee for ICCE97 Professor Thomas Ottmann and Professor Zahran Halim.



NEW FRONTIERS ... Datuk Dr Chan receiving the ICCE 97 proceedings from Professor Zawawi. PHOTOGRAPH: TH LU

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